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## Jordan's Spy Agency: Holding Cell for the CIA

Foreign Terror Suspects Tell of Torture

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AMMAN, Jordan -- Over the past seven years, an imposing building on the outskirts of this city has served as a secret holding cell for the CIA.

The building is the headquarters of the General Intelligence Department, Jordan's powerful spy and security agency. Since 2000, at the CIA's behest, at least 12 non-Jordanian terrorism suspects have been detained and interrogated here, according to documents and former prisoners, human rights advocates, defense lawyers and former U.S. officials.

In most of the cases, the spy center served as a covert way station for CIA prisoners captured in other countries. It was a place where they could be hidden after being arrested and kept for a few days or several months before being moved on to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, or CIA prisons elsewhere in the world.

Others were arrested while transiting through Jordan, including two detained during stopovers at Amman's international airport. Another prisoner, a microbiology student captured in Pakistan in the weeks after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, has not been seen since he was flown to Amman on a CIA plane six years ago.

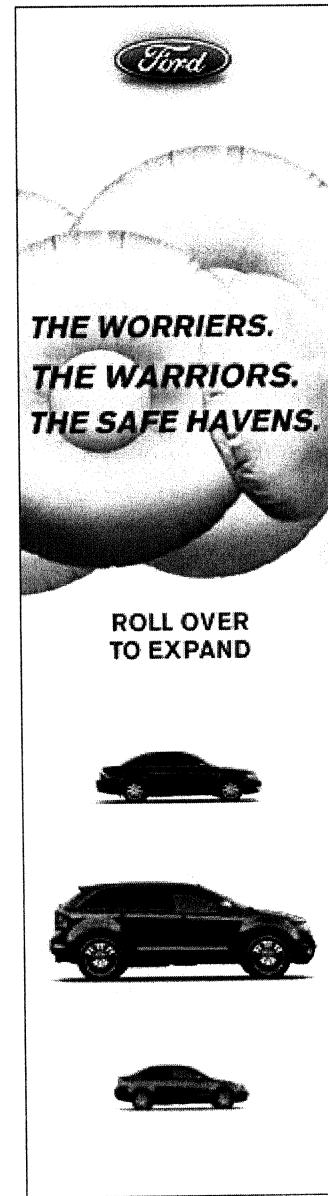
The most recent case to come to light involved a Palestinian detainee, Marwan al-Jabour, who was transferred to Jordan last year from a CIA-run secret prison, then released several weeks later in the Gaza Strip.

The General Intelligence Department, or GID, is perhaps the CIA's most trusted partner in the Arab world. The Jordanian agency has received money, training and equipment from the CIA for decades and even has a public English-language Web site. The relationship has deepened in recent years, with U.S. officials praising their Jordanian counterparts for the depth of their knowledge regarding al-Qaeda and other radical Islamic networks.

In the aftermath of Sept. 11, however, the GID was attractive for another reason, according to former U.S. counterterrorism officials and Jordanian human rights advocates. Its interrogators had a reputation for persuading tight-lipped suspects to talk, even if that meant using abusive tactics that could violate U.S. or international law.

"I was kidnapped, not knowing anything of my fate, with continuous torture and interrogation for the whole of two years," Al-Haj Abdu Ali Sharqawi, a Guantanamo prisoner from Yemen, recounted in a written account of his experiences in Jordanian custody. "When I told them the truth, I was tortured and beaten."

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Sharqawi was captured in Karachi, Pakistan, in February 2002 in a joint Pakistani-U.S. operation. Although the Guantanamo Bay prison had just opened, the CIA flew him instead to Amman, where he was imprisoned for 19 months, according to his account and flight records. He was later taken to another CIA-run secret prison, his statement says, before he was finally moved to Guantanamo in February 2004.

Sharqawi said he was threatened with sexual abuse and electrocution while in Jordan. He also said he was hidden from officials of the International Committee for the Red Cross during their visits to inspect Jordanian prisons.

"I was told that if I wanted to leave with permanent disability both mental and physical, that that could be arranged," Sharqawi said in his April 2006 statement, which was released by a London-based attorney, Clive Stafford Smith, who represents Guantanamo inmates. "They said they had all the facilities of Jordan to achieve that. I was told that I had to talk, I had to tell them everything."

Bush administration officials have said they do not hand over terrorism suspects to countries that are likely to abuse them. For several years, however, the State Department has cited widespread allegations of torture by Jordan's security agencies in its annual report cards on human rights.

Independent monitors have become increasingly critical of Jordan's record. Since 2006, the United Nations, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have issued reports on abuses in Jordan, often singling out the General Intelligence Department.

Former prisoners have reported that their captors were expert in two practices in particular: falaqa, or beating suspects on the soles of their feet with a truncheon and then, often, forcing them to walk barefoot and bloodied across a salt-covered floor; and farruj, or the "grilled chicken," in which prisoners are handcuffed behind their legs, hung upside down by a rod placed behind their knees, and beaten.

In a report released in January 2007, Manfred Nowak, the U.N. special investigator for torture, found that "the practice of torture is routine" at GID headquarters and concluded "that there is total impunity for torture and ill-treatment in the country."

Officials with the GID did not respond to a letter seeking an interview for this article. The Jordanian Foreign Ministry also did not respond to interview requests.

The CIA declined to comment on its relationship with the GID but defended in general the covert transfer of terrorism suspects to other countries, a practice known as rendition.

"The United States does not transfer individuals to any country if it believes they will be tortured there," said Paul Gimigliano, a CIA spokesman. "Setting aside the myths, rendition is, in fact, a lawful, effective tool that has been used over the years on a very limited scale, and is designed to take terrorists off the street."

### **'In Jordan, Nobody Asks'**

Immediately after Sept. 11, the CIA had nowhere to hold terrorism suspects it had captured abroad. The military prison at Guantanamo did not open until January 2002. And it took the CIA until the spring of 2002 to get its own network of secret overseas prisons up and running.

Short on options, the CIA sought help from its counterparts in Jordan. Soon, CIA airplanes began

carrying prisoners to Amman.

Jamil Qasim Saeed Mohammed, a Yemeni microbiology student, was captured in a U.S.-Pakistani operation in Karachi a few weeks after 9/11 on suspicion of helping to finance al-Qaeda operations. Witnesses reported seeing masked men take him aboard a Gulfstream V jet at the Karachi airport Oct. 24, 2001.

Records show that the plane was chartered by a CIA front company and that it flew directly to Amman. Mohammed has not been seen since. Amnesty International said it has asked the Jordanian government for information on his whereabouts but has not received an answer.

About the same time, Jamal Alawi Mari, another Yemeni citizen, was apprehended at his home in Karachi by Pakistani and U.S. agents. Records show that U.S. officials suspected him of working for Islamic charities that allegedly supported al-Qaeda.

Soon after, Mari was also flown by the CIA to Amman. "They never told me where I was going," he testified later before a U.S. military tribunal. "I found out later I was in Jordan."

Mari said he was imprisoned for four months in Jordan, out of sight of visiting Red Cross officials. In early 2002, he was taken to Guantanamo and remains imprisoned there.

Defense lawyers and human rights advocates in Amman said it wasn't a surprise that the CIA turned to Jordan's security agency for assistance.

"In America, people will ask about any breach of the law," said Younis Arab, a lawyer who has represented a CIA prisoner brought to Jordan. "Here in Jordan, nobody asks. So the Americans get the Jordanians to do the dirty work."

Other Jordanian lawyers cited unconfirmed reports that the CIA had transferred high-ranking al-Qaeda leaders to Jordan for interrogation. Although hard evidence is elusive, some former inmates have reported being detained in the same wing as Ramzi Binalshibh, a key planner in the Hamburg cell that carried out the Sept. 11 hijackings, said Abdulkareem al-Shureidah, an Amman lawyer.

"He was detained in Jordanian jails, definitely," Shureidah said of Binalshibh, who was kept in CIA custody in undisclosed locations from the time of his capture in Karachi in September 2002 until September 2006, when he was transferred to Guantanamo. "The U.S. brought all kinds of persons here from around the world."

Samieh Khreis, an Amman lawyer who has represented former Guantanamo inmates from Jordan, said testimony by former prisoners and others in Jordan reinforced a long-held suspicion that the CIA ran a satellite operation inside headquarters of the General Intelligence Department.

"Of course they had a jail here, a secret jail -- of course, no question," he said. "If they were to put me in that GID building over there, in my mind, it might as well be an American jail."

Khreis said the Jordanian spy service has a well-deserved reputation for using dubious tactics to force confessions. But he said the CIA sent prisoners to Amman primarily to take advantage of the GID's knowledge of Islamic radical groups.

"Torture is not the main reason," he said.

## A Flat Denial

On June 26, 2006, just after 6 p.m., Nowak, the U.N. investigator, paid a surprise visit to GID headquarters in Amman.

The Jordanian government had previously agreed to give Nowak carte blanche to inspect any prison in the country, with no preconditions and unfettered access to inmates. As a new member of the U.N. Human Rights Council, Jordan was eager to win Nowak's seal of approval. GID officials permitted Nowak to tour its prison wing. But they refused to allow him to speak with prisoners in private. When Nowak asked about allegations that the CIA had used the building as a proxy jail, department officials said the reports were untrue.

"The response was just very flat, a simple denial, 'We don't know anything about that,'" Nowak recalled in an interview.

In interviews with former GID prisoners, Nowak said, he heard repeated, credible reports of inmates being subjected to electric shocks, sleep deprivation and various forms of beatings, including farruj and falaqa.

He said several inmates reported that their chief tormentor was Col. Ali Birjak, head of the GID's counterterrorism unit and one of the officials who had denied cooperating with the CIA. Based on those interviews, Nowak recommended in his report that Birjak be investigated by Jordanian authorities on torture charges.

In a written response to Nowak's findings on Oct. 10, 2006, the Jordanian government called the torture allegations "untrue" and noted that they were lodged by people with criminal records.

"It is common for prisoners to make false allegations about torture in a pathetic attempt to evade punishment and to influence the court," the government wrote.

In interviews with The Washington Post, however, former prisoners of the GID gave similar accounts of physical abuse.

Masaad Omer Behari, a Sudanese citizen, spent 86 days in the department's custody in early 2003 after he was arrested during a stopover at Amman's international airport.

Behari said his interrogators wanted to know about his activities in Vienna, where he had lived for more than a decade. He had been asked many of the same questions previously by the FBI and Austrian security officials about an alleged plot to bomb the U.S. Embassy in Vienna in 1998, he said, though he had denied any role and was never charged.

While he was in custody in Amman, Behari said, guards meted out a combination of falaqa and farruj. They struck the soles of his feet with batons while he was handcuffed and hanging upside down, then doused him with cold water and forced him to walk over a salt-strewn floor.

"I thought they were going to kill me," he said. "I said my prayers, thinking I was going to die."

*Researcher Julie Tate in Washington contributed to this report.*

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